Editor’s Inaugural Message

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The beginning of this year marks the 30th year of the Molecular Biology and Evolution (MBE) publication, which first appeared in December 1983. In the ensuing three decades since the inaugural issue, the field of molecular biology has undergone a remarkable transformation due to an ongoing revolution in sequencing technology. Never before has the field of molecular biology been more relevant for deciphering the blueprint of life and decrypting its functional significance in a dazzling variety of organisms, including humans.

In turn, the sequencing revolution has transformed the understanding of evolutionary patterns and processes illuminated by molecular evolutionary studies. The rapid growth of MBE is a testament to our increasing awareness of this interplay. The frequency of publication as well as the number of pages per issue has doubled, since the first volume of MBE was published. The journal has truly fulfilled the goals of its founders (Walter Fitch and Masatoshi Nei), who aimed to provide the community with an avenue to publish research at the interface of molecular evolution and biology.

Over the next five years, I plan to continue in the tradition of the founding editors and their successors, while expanding the reach and improving the efficiency of the journal. MBE will publish molecular evolutionary patterns, processes, and predictions at all levels of taxonomic, functional, genomic, and phenotypic organization. We will also welcome contributions that present new and improved methods, resources, and theories critical for advancing molecular evolutionary research. Further, we will periodically issue special calls for papers to modernize and strengthen areas of research and development showcased in MBE.

Starting with this first issue of volume 30, MBE has a new look. Its front cover now shows different art from one or more selected contributions. Also, the MBE content is now organized into three primary categories in each issue: Discoveries, Methods, and Resources. Within each category, we publish short single-point contributions (Letters, ~4 printed pages) and long in-depth contributions (Articles, ~10 printed pages). In the Resources section, we also publish two new types of manuscripts: Brief Communications and Protocols. Brief Communications are two-page resource updates of methodologies, technologies (software and databases), or experimental protocols that have the potential of very significant and immediate impact on the scientific community. Protocols provide step-by-step instructions to carry out evolutionary analyses of molecular data for specific purposes using one or more resources published in MBE. In addition to Discoveries, Methods, Resources, Brief Communications, and Protocols, MBE will regularly publish balanced reviews of recent developments in one or more fields in molecular and evolutionary biology (Reviews) and forward-looking perspectives suggesting future directions in a field or application of molecular evolution (Perspectives).

As the new Editor-in-Chief, I have updated the editorial process by designing a system that fosters uniformity and consistency of editorial actions. We are now asking all authors to specifically list significant discoveries, methodological/theoretical advances, and tools/resources reported at the time of manuscript submission in a standardized format. In addition, authors are requested to clearly state how the work presented will have broader impact on science or on the community. The board of editors for MBE is informed by this information when identifying manuscripts that are suitable for in-depth reviews, which are handled by the Associate Editors (AEs). During the in-depth review, peer reviewers are asked to provide a ranking of the manuscript using the criteria for which the authors have provided the above-mentioned information during the submission process. In this way, all the MBE editors will now be able to evaluate manuscripts with greater consistency, as our primary task is to take these two sets of corresponding information and use our judgment to arrive at the final publication priority for each manuscript.

MBE is committed to publishing all manuscripts receiving a high or top priority recommendation during the review process, whereas those receiving medium priority will be considered for publication on a case-by-case basis. In addition, publication of manuscripts receiving the top priority will be fast tracked, that is, they will be published online within 1 week and in the print edition of MBE in the next scheduled issue. This policy reflects my interest in quickly publishing all manuscripts judged to be the most impactful during the peer review process.

In collaboration with Oxford University Press, I am also taking steps to increase the speed of acceptance-to-print for all other manuscripts. I expect that MBE will soon print papers 6–8 weeks after acceptance, which would rival the speed of publication of the fastest specialist journals around. It is, however, important to note that MBE is already publishing every manuscript online soon after the editorial decision, so all accepted manuscripts are already available to the community via Advance Access very quickly. Each Advance Access manuscripts has an official assigned DOI (document object identifier), which makes it a definitive publication ready to be cited immediately as published work.

Finally, it is a privilege for me to work alongside an exceptional group of editors, all of whom have selflessly agreed to devote their expertise and their precious time to making MBE the best journal publishing molecular evolutionary research. Many of them will serve as Senior Editors (SEs) with the responsibility to work with me and the AEs in developing...
the final recommendations. They represent a remarkable breadth and depth of knowledge that is demanded by the expanding universe of organismal and conceptual biological disciplines engaged in molecular evolutionary research. Ultimately, every SE assists me in handling and deciding on a broad range of contributions. MBE does not have disciplinary sections and, thus, no section editors, because it is not possible to cover the breadth of molecular evolutionary research with a few uniformly accepted labels. Instead, MBE’s primary focus is on publishing papers offering the most significant implications for the field. For this reason, I will continue to evolve the board of editors, such that MBE embraces new and emerging trends quickly, while maintaining strength in traditional areas that have made MBE the most respected journal in the field. We are also improving the MBE journal website to become more author-friendly. It now contains detailed information on the editorial process, which prominently highlights outstanding contributions and provides thematic collections of high-impact MBE publications.

I close this message by inviting everyone to submit their exciting research to MBE. Acceptance of your work for publication in MBE is no longer limited by the number of print pages, as all papers receiving a high degree of enthusiasm in the peer-review process will find a home in MBE. Therefore, we are committed to publishing all discoveries, methods, resources, and reviews that significantly advance the field of molecular evolution and its applications.

With your support as authors, reviewers, and editors, I see very bright prospects for MBE to serve science and the scientific community even better in the future.